

AFEHRI File 19-10

**Research Materials/Source Documents
ENLISTED FIRSTS**

FILE TITLE: 1st Human Subsonic Ejection - First Sergeant Lawrence Lambert

Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative G.R. Akin date 27 Dec 97

EPC Representative Joe G. Akin date 28 Jan 98

Scanner Operator Sung J. Akin date 13 Nov 98

APPROVED BY: Gary R. Akin
GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF
Director
Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

THE P-61 WAS THE FIRST SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED NIGHT FIGHTER OF THE US AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY. THE FIRST PROTOTYPE FLEW ON 21 MAY 1942, BUT FULL SCALE PRODUCTION WAS DELAYED BY PROBLEMS WITH THE DESIGN OF THE AIRBORNE RADAR. IT FINALLY WENT INTO PRODUCTION IN 1944 AND A TOTAL OF ALMOST 700 WERE BUILT BY THE END OF WW II. IT REMAINED IN SERVICE UNTIL REPLACED BY JET AIRCRAFT IN 1952.

THE P-61 CREW SAT IN TANDEM WITH THE PILOT FORWARD AND THE GUNNER IMMEDIATELY BEHIND HIM IN THE RAISED COCKPIT. THE RADAR OPERATOR WAS IN THE REAR POSITION. THE TOP TURRET COULD BE OPERATED REMOTELY BY ALL CREW MEMBERS, BUT THE GUNNER USUALLY OPERATED THE FOUR .50S FOR VISUAL CONTACTS.

GUNNERS ON AAF NIGHT FIGHTERS ARE THE ONLY GUNNERS OFFICIALLY CREDITED WITH AERIAL VICTORIES IN WW II AS EACH CREW MEMBER RECEIVED CREDIT FOR DOWNING AN ENEMY AIRCRAFT. THE HIGHEST SCORING GUNNER ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL RECORDS WAS SSGT EMIL K. WEISHAR, 421ST NIGHT FIGHTER SQUADRON IN THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC THEATER OF OPERATIONS.

ON 17 AUGUST 1946, ARMY AIR FORCES FIRST SERGEANT LAWRENCE LAMBERT WON THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS WHEN HE BECAME THE FIRST HUMAN IN THE UNITED STATES TO EJECT FROM THE P-61 AIRCRAFT USING THE NEWLY DEVELOPED PILOT EJECTION SEAT. LAMBERT WAS SHOT OUT OF THE AIRCRAFT BY A 37MM CARTRIDGE AND EXPERIENCED 12 TO 14 G'S AS HE CLEARED THE TAIL FIN BY ABOUT 20 FEET. HIS ACTIONS HELPED SOLVE ONE OF THE MOST ACUTE PROBLEMS IN THE AAF, THE ESCAPE OF PERSONNEL FROM HIGH SPEED AIRCRAFT.

The first manned test of an American ejection seat was made by Sgt L. Lambert, USAAF, who was ejected from a Northrop P-61 Black Widow on 17 August 1946. The two-seat aircraft was travelling at 300 mph (483 km/h) at 7800 ft (2375 m).



P-61 Black Widow Night Fighter, Jack-In-The-Box showing the first ejection of a human subject in the United States. The airplane was moving at a true air speed of about 300 miles an hour and an altitude of 7,800 feet when Sergeant Lawrence Lambert was ejected.